GOP pick to be decisive factor for 'average' guy

A FAMILY ROOM (Monday Night) — The Average American is average once again. And if he has not completely tired of the attention, then at least the fancy has worn off for Richard Johnson of Rolling Meadows.

Four years ago, a public affairs center decided that Johnson represented the typical American. That made him special by definition.

Now he is again like other Americans. Johnson is confused. He will look toward Kansas City tonight for an answer to one question, "How will I vote in November?"

Johnson and the nation must decide later this year between the Democratic peanut farmer and his opponent, either the incumbent President or the former movie actor.

"I'll be very honest," Johnson said. "If it's between Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, I'll vote for Carter. If it's between President Ford and Carter, I'll vote for Ford. So there."

RICHARD JOHNSON, like millions of Americans, sat in his family room Monday evening, a highball in one hand, his attention fixed upon his television set, which spewed forth Republican condemnations of Democrats.

Like millions of American, Johnson viewed the speakers parade of big Republican losers, perhaps the most appropriate symbol for the COP, which currently ranks almost third in a two-party White House race.

Out strode a proud but never fully appreciated Nelson A. Rockefeller, relegated to his vice presidency after four unsuccessful attempts to gain the Republican Party's higher nomination.

Son introduced father when Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona took the platform. The elder Goldwater outlasted Rockefeller for the 1964 GOP nomination. But he was crushed on election day by Lyndon B. Johnson.

The Republicans even brought forth Grandfather time in the person of 88-year-old Alf Landon. He had no chance 40 years ago against Franklin D. Roosevelt.

BUT AFTER BOLSTERING their own pride, and hearing Sen. Goldwater blast the "demagoguery that passes for leadership in the other party," the Republicans had just previewed the fierce infighting that would ensue Tuesday and Wednesday. The nation watched.

"Who will be their candidate?" the nation's voters wondered Monday evening. Would it be incumbent President Gerald Ford or surprising challenger Ronald Reagan, the former movie actor?

The candidate's identity should be known tonight after a long roll call. The tight decision will be cloaked in tears of both joy and disappointment. President Ford was being given the edge Tuesday.

But for Richard Johnson, there was something very special to be considered Monday evening.

It was the Sunday move by his own congressman, Rep. Philip Crane, R-12th, to abandon Reagan and attempt to draft conservative New York Sen. James Buckley as a compromise third presidential candidate.

CRANE HAD BEEN Reagan's Illinois campaign manager until he quit. the "Draft Buckley" movement died when the New York senator said, "No thanks."

"Where does that leave Crane?" Johnson wondered. "Where's he going to go? Who's he going to support now, Ford? It wasn't a smart move on his part."

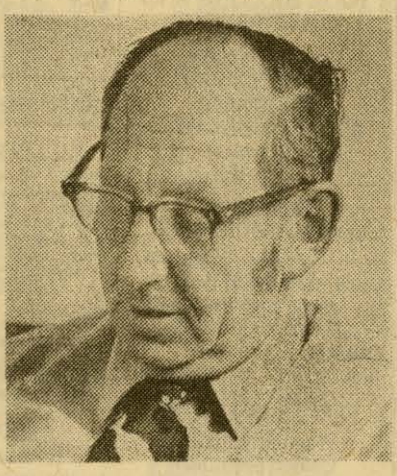
These past four weeks have been difficult ones to understand for the common voter.

Reagan shocked the political process followers when he named Sen. Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania as his running mate. It was the oddest marriage possible, the very conservative Reagan wedded to the liberal Schweiker.

"Talk about Schweiker. Did you know much about him before Reagan brought him into the picture?" Johnson asked. "I sure didn't. No matter what you read or hear, I still don't know why he (Schweiker) was selected so early."

Today

Mike Klein's people



RICHARD JOHNSON

The move, calculated by Reagan campaign manager John Sears, was designed to swing liberal and moderate Republicans away from the President and into the former California governor's camp.

WHEN FORD LOST no ground and Reagan gained none, the experts said that Ford was now assured of an easier convention, one with less bloodletting.

But it did not appear that way when tht Reagan forces barnstormed into Kansas City, ready for a scrap.

Richard Johnson, who always has voted Democratic except in 1972 when he case a ballot for Richard M. Nixon, watched closely Monday evening. His observations were mostly in the form of questions.

Who was this Schweiker? Who might Ford select as his running mate? Why had Crane defected from Reagan's camp? Was there a deal made between Ford and Buckley? Why so few black convention delegates?

There were so many questions. Johnson wondered if Rockefeller doesn't kick himself today for asking to be removed from vice presidential consideration.

"IF HE WANTED it bad enough and made a showing, I think Ford would ask him again," Johnson said. "He'd have it wrapped up."

Although the Republicans preached togetherness and love, even Richard Johnson could see that, "It's a party divided. There's no question. After they've decided who their man will be, they'll have to unite."

And who will emerge as the Republican candidate? Johnson predicted Gerald Ford.

"I don't go for Reagan," Johnson said. "I just don't. whatever he does, I don't care because I don't think he'll win the nomination. And if he does, I'll vote for Carter."